

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SIX INDICTED ON MULTIPLE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE VIOLATIONS

Six persons have been indicted by a Federal grand jury in Miami, Florida, on charges of violating Federal wildlife laws involving the importation and quarantine of birds.

Bert R. Slocum, of Miami Lakes, Florida, one of the largest exotic bird dealers in the country, was indicted on 16 counts. He owns the Quality Bird Company in Miami which was one of the first U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved quarantine stations in the country. Slocum also runs two other quarantine stations and a warehouse holding facility for birds.

The indictment is the result of the investigative efforts of a Miami-based Government task force comprised of special agents of the USDA, the U.S. Customs Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and an attorney from the Justice Department's Wildlife Section.

The 16-count indictment charges the defendants with violating agricultural quarantine laws, customs laws, and fish and wildlife laws, and with conspiracy and obstruction of justice. Slocum was indicted on all 16 counts; his wife, Louise V. Slocum, was indicted on 10 counts; and his son, Ray B. Slocum, was indicted on 3 counts. Quality Bird Company employees Doris Fuller and Francille Miller, both of Miami, were indicted on four counts each. Misri Persad, operator of Guyana Wildlife Specialties, a wildlife sales and export company in Guyana, South America, was indicted on five counts.

The indictment charges Bert and Ray Slocum, Doris Fuller, and Francille Miller with conspiring to enter and maliciously breaking into a USDA quarantine facility, removing birds from customs custody that had been exposed to exotic Newcastle disease, and mixing them with healthy birds at another location.

Exotic Newcastle disease poses a serious threat to American agriculture and pet industries. Imported birds can transmit the highly contagious viral disease to poultry and other fowl. From 1971 through 1973, the Federal Government destroyed 12 million fowl in flocks exposed to this disease at a cost to the taxpayers of \$56 million. Importation of all birds was totally banned during this time.

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The indictment also charges that Bert Slocum presented USDA with a fraudulent claim for \$290,383 for diseased birds that had been destroyed by USDA and further states that he was responsible for exposing the birds to the disease. Under USDA regulations, if exotic Newcastle disease is discovered in birds, they are destroyed by USDA and the owner reimbursed for his losses.

The two elder Slocums and Persad also were charged with conspiracy to import exotic birds into the U.S. by submitting false and fictitious invoices and customs entry documents, and falsely stating the values and numbers of the imported birds.

The grand jury also charged that Bert and Louise Slocum conspired to import protected birds such as peregrine falcons, aplomado falcons, and burrowing owls in violation of the Endangered Species Act, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Maximum penalties for violations of the statutes are: \$10,000 and 5 years imprisonment for conspiracy; \$5,000 and 2 years imprisonment for importing birds with false customs documents; \$10,000 and 5 years imprisonment for filing false or fraudulent claims with USDA; \$5,000 and 2 years imprisonment for removing goods from customs custody; \$500 and 6 months imprisonment for importing migratory birds; \$1,000 and 1 year imprisonment for violating USDA quarantine regulations; and \$5,000 and 5 years imprisonment for obstruction of justice.

The indictment was returned by a Federal grand jury in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida. Assistant U.S. Attorney James McMaster and Justice Department attorney Michael Gewirtz of Washington, D.C., are prosecuting the case.

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